

it takes all kinds number four



Correction for issue 3: my grandfather's name should have read Don Blonigen Sr instead of Jr. Apologies for any confusion.

**sound and vision** by Steve Green

drowning in a rainbow ocean,  
i reach out my hands  
towards the microphone

a deafening silence  
fills the darkness beyond the stage

riding the crest of an adrenalin wave,  
i stretch my soul  
across the audience

a trembling stillness  
pervades the shadows

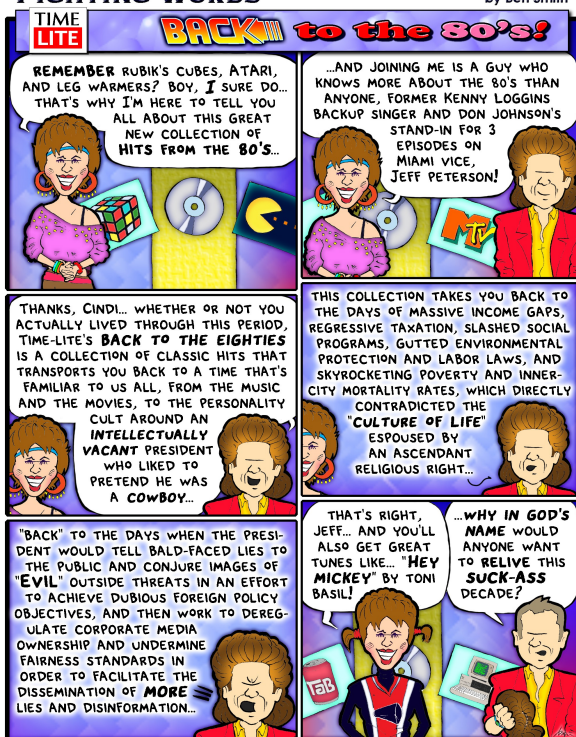
plunged into a sea of rhythm,  
my voice launches itself  
and is lost amongst my disciples

their chorus echoes my lyrics;  
my songs mouth their unspoken  
loves and fears

they yearn to become me,  
never comprehending  
my desire to become them  
and escape the spotlight

## FIGHTING WORDS

by Ben Smith



### The Sacred Book of Coffee. By Loki Caspari

Those of us who live and die by the coffee recognize this book for what it really is;  
a collection of funny stories which may seem vaguely blasphemous to those with no sense  
of humor whatsoever. We encourage such people not to read any further.

### The Gospel of Java. [part 4]

This Manuscript was unearthed in a dumpster behind the Java Joint Espresso Bar during an archaeological expedition/open mike nite in 1997, where it is believed to have lain undisturbed for at least three hours. The author in unknown and it's authenticity has never been verified, but such details as can be confirmed raise uncomfortable questions. As such, it has been widely renounced as apocryphal by church leaders.

But be ye ever vigilant and righteous in thy Coffee, for there shall come among you those who would see thy sacred Coffee enslaved and thy temples torn down to be replaced with their own graven idols and inferior brews. They will come among you not for love of Coffee, but for greed and conformity, and a need to see all things the same.

Ye shall know these traitors by the signs they shall display, that of the caribou, and the male deer from the stars. Ye shall know them by the signs thanking ye for smoking not! Ye shall know them by their non-biodegradable Styrofoam containers! And ye shall see that they do erect their false temples on unholy ground, strip malls and shopping centers, yea, even unto the lobbies of major corporations head offices.

I say unto thee no good can come of these places, and no good Coffee either, turn ye aside from them and pay no heed to their pleas of "Organically Grown." Nor be ye tempted by their cries of "Discount Card!" Look ye not to their menu and consider, for the Coffee of these places shall be as ashes and dust in thy mouth. And there shall be a great wailing and gnashing of teeth, and the women shall wail and rip their clothing in their grief, and fall upon one another with... (here the original manuscript becomes illegible for several pages, and resumes in what appears to be a different hand.)

And those who serve in these false temples shall be known by the tags of gold with which they profane their sacred black apron. For upon these tags shall be written, "Hello my name is," as these poor lost souls needs must have even this simple thing written down, lest they forget. By this alone may ye know them for what they are, and know that they know not of true Coffee, nay, nor have they hope for redemption until they cast down their golden tags. For yea, it is more difficult for a servant of strange Coffee to understand true Java, than it is for a cracked Coffee bean to pass through an extra-fine espresso filter.



Yukon suite  
by Beth Langford

(1)

The picture is never the real thing.  
Even the horsetails pose for you;  
the wind is quiet, the sun blinks.  
The airplanes are shy, the dogs  
younger, the strangers brazen,  
and everyone  
loves you.



(2)

The sedge by the river delta smells like raw dough  
waiting to be baked and the mud makes way for me even  
before I ask, but the clouds make their own patterns.  
On the mountains, they cut them out of light.

photos by Beth Langford

(3)

The dust above  
the highway  
is going nowhere.

Every wave breaks  
a white crab scuttles  
towards shore reaching



**Rasputin Catamite****1990**

Chronicles of Upir's Mark,  
the most terrifying rock  
group of post-Communist  
Russia and quite possibly,  
THE UNIVERSE!

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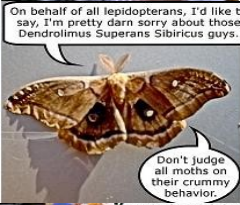
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## The Missing Person

Short Semi-Fiction by Eric Blair

I had the best of intentions when I went home with her, but somehow it all went wrong. Creeping out from under her arm at five in the morning I couldn't remember if her name was Angie or Amber let alone why I thought it could have possibly ended any differently. Sordid encounters with unbalanced women seemed to come with the job. I was a private detective and I'd flown into Salt Lake City, Utah on the red eye to solve a missing persons case. I was to discover the location of a kid named Wesley Sadler. His family seemed nice enough, but you could tell by the way they talked about him that they were pretty sure he was dead. But, if that was the case where was the body? They went on at an inane length about what a smart kid he was and how proud they were of him. It's the way people talk about the deceased, they never have anything negative to say about you once you are six feet underground. He was nearly twenty-three years old, nearly six foot four, and nearly 150 pounds. As far as I could tell the fates nearly let him live. After speaking with his parents I studied his living space. He lived in a house less than a mile away from his parents with one other person. His mother owned the house so he got a deal on the rent, which was the only way he was able to afford the place. To the untrained eye his room was a complete mess, but in my line of work that's quite preferable to clean and organized. The messier something is the easier the clues are to find. There were old magazines mixed in with dirty clothes. A book of matches. A copy of a publication called "Chiaroscuro." A bowling ball. A gas mask, unused of course. A chessboard covered in dust. All of the signs of this kid's life were reduced to no more than one of those installation pieces. The exhibit would be referred to as "The Missing Person." Every inch of carpet covered by some sort of clutter. In the clutter near his bookshelves was a pile of postcards and letters from what was obviously a girlfriend at one point. The books were alphabetized by author and title. Strange. Order in chaos. The letters were postmarked years ago, but it was still my first lead. Being a private detective is all about names and numbers. Bank accounts. Dates. Addresses. Phone numbers. A wallet sized card listing phone numbers of family, friends, and work contacts was located near his computer on a desk that took up roughly one sixth of the room. It was

easy to find having been typed out on bright red paper. Besides for the computer the desk was home to a stack of comic books, a paper sack filled with zip-lock bags containing razor blades and scrapes of paper with reasons to kill oneself printed on them, some beat literature, an unlabeled VHS tape, and lined paper containing what were apparently meant to be lyrics. A bass guitar hid in the closet behind a rack of t-shirts and a pile of shoes. One of the slips of paper packaged with a razor blade read, "You don't really believe in hell, do you?" That one brought an unwelcome smile to my face. Another said, "It's a permanent solution to a never ending series of problems." I couldn't help but agree with that. The blades suggested suicide, but the question remained. Where was the body? After I attempted to get in touch with the postcard mailing ex-girlfriend I spent nearly twenty minutes

speaking with her father. She was also missing. He wanted me to let him know if I found out anything. Anything. He emphasized it by saying it twice. He said she had a drug problem. Methamphetamine. I told him that to her it must have been a drug solution—better living through chemistry and all that—and hung up the phone. It seemed like a coincidence, but in my line of work there is seldom such a thing. Stand far enough away from the facts and everything connects, only up close does anything ever appear to be random. I called everybody else on the list of phone numbers. Some were disconnected. Others had obnoxious answering machine messages. The list was clearly out of date. The one person I did get a hold of was a girl that attended high school with the missing person. The subject. The posthumous client. In order to remain objective it is important to use words like "subject" or "client" in place of the actual person's name. Sometimes I refer to them by their social security number. Occasionally I call them widgets. The important thing is not to get too close. Too involved. Too personal. After speaking with the girl she made it clear that they had never dated, though she suspects he probably wanted them to have. Throughout the conversation she maintained a genuine concern about the subject's well being, something that his parent's couldn't even keep up. A child screamed in the background, I wished her luck, and politely ended the conversation. After I got off the phone the roommate came home. At first he seemed startled by my presence. He was clearly at least somewhat inebriated, but then again so was I. Any occupation that requires you to be surrounded by such an immense amount of human misery will generally be one where drinking on the job is considered normal. I showed him my identification and offered to buy him a late lunch. If anybody was going to be able to provide any useful information it would be him. After we ordered at a nearby diner and

Understand by Misty O'Brien  
I thought I knew it all  
But I didn't  
I thought I gave it all  
I guess not  
Though I may have told you  
I need to tell you again

You don't understand my strange desire  
Nor my intense need  
If I said what you wanted to hear  
You wouldn't get it anyway  
I don't know what I want anymore  
I want you then I don't

I turn around and spin  
The light reflects from your eyes  
The dead have stilled  
Steel remaining in clenched hands  
The statuettes moved  
They smiled at me

This is racing through my head  
I know you can't understand  
You couldn't save me  
I couldn't either  
Silence fills my empty room  
I don't know how much more I can stand



I answered the same patience grating questions about my profession I always seem to find myself answering we began to talk about the subject. He related to me the tale of discovering that his friend had disappeared. Their schedules were as such that they saw each other mostly only on weekends so nobody is quite sure exactly when the disappearance occurred. One day though the subject's place of employment called inquiring as to his whereabouts. After a few days of these calls the roommate called his friend's family who soon called the police. They wasted the tax payers' money for a few months and then essentially threw in the towel. That's when I was called in. As the roommate rambled on about b-movies he used to watch repeatedly with the subject I found myself making eyes with the waitress. She was about five and a half feet tall with unnaturally black hair. Pale skin, lipstick red lips, and a tattoo creeping out of her pants onto that flesh no t-shirt would dare cover up. Her name tag said either Amber or Angie. She winked at me. Her name definitely began with the letter "A". The roommate lit a cigarette and took yet another swig off of a cheap bottle of vodka he had concealed in his jacket pocket. I apologized for his behavior and escorted him outside. Lest the Utah Clean Air Act be forgotten.. He told me that no one understood him and I promptly called him a cab. I re-entered the restaurant looking for the winking waitress. No dice. The food had arrived though, it looked awful. The meal was burned beyond recognition and covered in raw onions. Fuck food, I decided to call it a day. I'd go back to my hotel room, polish off a bottle, and go over the facts. It seemed, however, that fate had other plans for me that evening.

I was starting my rental car in the parking lot when I saw her leaning against the outside of the diner smoking a cigarette. The radio played a song I hated for being so catchy and her lips pulled on that cigarette like it was life itself. She winked again and the next thing I knew I was offering her a ride home. She seemed to be looking through my coat and directly at the gun I carried when she accepted my offer. In all my years as a private detective I've never fired my gun, though I have found it necessary to point it at people occasionally. Driving to her apartment on the other side of town I told her that she really shouldn't accept rides from strangers. She coyly responded by asking me if I'm strange. I'm already her prisoner at this point and I ask her why she'd ask me that. Does she like strange men? She told me that she was only wondering if she should be leaping out of the car. She had a clever response to every question I threw at her.

For a few moments, in the car, there was silence. It wasn't nearly as awkward as it should have been. She was comfortably setting in the passenger side seat and my mind was quite overworked. Why had I offered her a ride? What was I intending/hoping to happen between the two of us? Why did I have a Leonard Cohen song stuck in my head? Why was I unable to remember most of the words? And where—where was the body of Wesley Sadler?

Once we arrived at her building she got out of my car and began to walk away, but then turned back and leaned into the passenger side window. The angle was pornographic. I was hers far before she asked if I'd like to come up for a drink. I justified it to myself by telling myself that there are no coincidences—which is bullshit by the way—and that she worked very close to the residence of the subject. The client. The victim. The suicide. She may have known something. I certainly had the best of intentions in heart as I followed her up some stairs and had a few drinks with her, but after that my memory is fucked. I must have had more to drink than I thought.

I woke up in her bed. There was no telling how much time had passed, it could have been two minutes and it could have been two hours. Ask an alcoholic how much sleep they get and you'll begin to get the picture. At first I just tried to get back to sleep, but then as I became increasingly more conscious I realized how sticky I was. Confused I searched for a light switch near the bed with my free hand. When I found it I wished that I hadn't. Blood. Somehow it had all gone wrong. I slithered out from under her arm and into my clothes, left her apartment, and descended the staircase. I drove to the hotel and hastily gathered the few personal belongings I had brought with me. After returning the car to the rental agency I caught the next flight out of Salt Lake City. I spent the seven hour flight trying to convince myself that the police weren't going to be waiting for me when I stepped off of the plane.

Editor's note: We have 3 columns by Dangerous Lee. Enjoy!

August, 2006 Q: Why in the hell does Lil' Kim look like a friggin' Barbie now? Did we, as black people, not support her enough during her Pre-LaToya Jackson Days? And Vivica Fox too, she got a nose job. I guess my question is: What's with Black Hollywood's sudden (or not so sudden) interest in plastic surgery? —Tanika San Jose, CA

A: Everyone in Hollywood is obsessed with their appearance, why should African Americans be any different? Actually it's not just a Hollywood thing. You are concerned with your appearance as well, you just can't afford to make yourself look like a damn fool!

Q: At what point on a date is a guy considered an easy mark sexually? —Bear Mystic Santa Barbarian, CA

A: A man is always an easy mark sexually.

Q: Why do short men go for much taller women? —Joycoco Puff Orange County, CA

A: Short men like to climb things.

Q: What would be the benefits and negative consequences of adding a "girlfriend" into my marriage and how do you see it making our friendship, relationship, and marriage stronger? —Yay Heard? Vallejo, CA

A: You stand the chance of being cut out of the situation. You better make sure you can surpass one lady before you add another into the equation. If not, get the video camera and Vaseline ready!

Q: Why are there not more African Americans in the NHL? That's the National Hockey League. —Brian Behave, Flint

A: Duh! I know what the NHL is. That question is like asking why aren't there more white men in the NBA? I figure it's because brothas hate ice and want to keep all their teeth. You may be able to get more black men involved with an ad campaign like this: Join the NHL. Guaranteed to Kick a White Man's Ass Each Game!

### **Greener Grass is Not Necessarily Better**

I, like many of you, feel that in order to be successful and happy I need to leave Flint. There are no jobs here and it's boring! That is how I felt, but as I write this month's column from sunny California, my mind has changed. Yes, the economy sucks, but Flint is far from being the only city with that problem and, well, boring is a state of mind. If you're reading The Uncommon Sense then you know there is plenty to do here in Flint.

Let me explain my situation:

I came to Los Angeles for a vacation with my four-year-old daughter and have happily come to the conclusion that Los Angeles is not where I want to be for my career or family. No, not just because my daughter drove me nuts the entire time I was here (though that is a huge part of it). My support system, one that I trust, is here in Flint, and when you have children, their well-being must come first. As a whole, my reasons for wanting to relocate to a place like Los Angeles were selfish. Being here in Los Angeles for a few days has shown me that I can't handle it and quite frankly don't have to because what I have been looking for has always been right in front of me.

Of course I was thinking that I could make more money here in Los Angeles and be closer to opportunities in my field, but that is simply not the case. I had an epiphany a few months ago that I needed to get the hell out of Flint, but I wasn't listening close enough. What I was told in my epiphany was to pursue my dreams and not give up. I wasn't being told to pursue them outside of Genesee County. If in pursuit of my dreams I am taken to a place outside of Michigan so be it, but it will be when I am ready and for the right reasons. I am simply not ready to make a drastic move with my child. Hell, even if I didn't have a child I am simply not ready.

I took a trip to Los Angeles two years ago without child and I had a ball. I met celebs, partied, got into clubs for free and stayed out all night. It was also a business trip and that part sucked. I was taken in by the party scene because it is so much different from partying in Flint, which I don't enjoy! So, I guess you can say that I was blinded by the excitement and fun that I had in Los Angeles. If I lived there, that would not be a major part of my reality, and to be quite honest, that's all that appeals to me about living in Los Angeles. Unfortunately, or fortunately, I can't live Paris Hilton's life.

The reality is that I can write anywhere in the world and quite frankly people I have





many opportunities on the horizon right here in good ol' Flint, Michigan. Why would I leave that to go and starve in Los Angeles? Flint is my home and when I am away I miss it. I learned I wasn't a big city chick when I lived in New York City. After nine months of suffering in NYC I got on a Greyhound bus and headed back home.

I say all this to give you some real advice and let you know that if you think your life will automatically change for the better because you leave Flint, think again. Relocation does not equal success. Plan. Save. Think. Visit what you think your ideal location is. Be logical! You take all your drama and baggage with you, so if you're running away from something realize that it follows you. Make sure you're relocating for a better life and because more money will be in your bank account. Anything else is a waste of time as you may find yourself right back at square one.

So, that's the deal Flint, you're stuck with Dangerous Lee!

September, 2006 **Q:** Why is it that girl on girl action in porn is very popular among straight people whereas boy on boy action is still considered taboo? —JPB, New York, NY

**A:** Sweetheart, why would a straight man or a straight woman want to see two men having sex? Huh? I'm sure heterosexual porn is taboo amongst homosexual people as well. In my opinion watching two men have sex is not sexy at all. I don't particularly care for girl on girl action either, but I'll watch it before I watch two dudes make each other feel good any day. Don't take it personally that your straight friends don't want to see that home video you made.

**Q:** How come certain fine women are jealous of each other? —Breynes, Lomita, California  
**A:** I'm not sure which certain fine women you're talking about, but my guess is that they're trying to gain the attention of some sorry dude that is obsessed with their physical attributes. In that case it's not so much jealousy as it is a competition.

**Q:** Why is MySpace so full of all these promoters, modeling scouts, producers, music consultants, CEOs, COOs, record executives, video directors and company presidents who approach you about doing business but get offended when you ask them about their credentials? —Theory, Flint, MI

**A:** I'm finding that MySpace is full of shit! Just a lot of wannabe hustlers and pimps, but it's basically filled with hoes!

**Q:** How was God created or who created God? —Poppa C. Breeze, Dearborn Heights, MI

**A:** Are you seriously asking ME this question? Pop open a Bible and come to your own conclusion or ask a judgmental Christian. They will tell you what to think.

**Q:** Who was the last man baking pies in my bathroom? —Movie Master Mark, Macomb, MI

**A:** I dunno, ask your boyfriend.

### **Boys Will Be Boys**

I'm getting real tired of how you people are raising your sons. You let your teenage boys run wild at all hours of the night raising hell and doing other things that they have no business doing, things they should not even be doing when they're of age...and why? Because they're boys and boys will be boys, right? Is this why they're easier to raise? This is what I keep hearing from people lately (especially women)—"I want sons because they're easier to raise. Girls are too much!" Is it because you remember the little pain in the ass you were growing up and you can't handle the mirror image?

Some of the sob stories for not wanting daughters consists of: They have babies, you have to comb their hair, dress them up and paint their nails, they have to be protected and coddled, and the big one is...they have attitude! Ain't that a bitch?

Yes, lazy ass, combing your daughters' hair is mandatory, but the painting of nails, not so much, although it is fun for you and the child and a sweet bonding experience. Yes, we must protect our daughters, but our sons need protection as well and they also need to be taught how to use it. That was a reference to sex for you slow people. And, hell yeah girls have attitude; we have periods which also means that yes we have babies!

Laziness and ignorance is running rampant and quite frankly should be against the law when you're a parent. Maybe if we coddled our boys and dressed them up real cute they wouldn't grow up to be emotionally retarded badasses. I believe this is why I can't find a decent man to spend time with. It seems that most men were raised by passive parents that let them do whatever they wanted and slacked off on life teaching skills because they believe they have "good boys." In actuality their "good boys" are out there raising all kinds of hell while they're raising themselves which leads to jail or death. Do you want to see your son become a statistic or would you rather he "Be a Man," whatever the hell that

means!

Those little girls that you're keeping at home and dressing real cute are gonna grow up and be strong, intelligent, male-like creatures because while you feel they're harder to raise you managed to do what was necessary to raise a stable child, though she may be afraid to interact with human beings. Have you realized that many women these days are very independent and hard asses whereas men are dependent on women and act like wusses?

I'm begging you to stop treating little boys like wild animals. They have feelings and emotions and need to cry and vent. This is a human thing, not a female thing. Boys need guidance, hugs, and they also need to sit their little asses at home and read a book sometimes. Let's try something new and let's raise our sons and daughters with the same rules and regulations.

Got something to add to this discussion? Check out my blog on MySpace by clicking on "Are Boys Easier to Raise?" Dangerous Lee is also the creator of Tude Tops. Get yours at [www.TudeTops.com](http://www.TudeTops.com).

**October, 2006 Q:** Why is it that when you complain about the food at a restaurant they give you a certificate for a complimentary meal? -Dawn C., Whereabouts Unknown

**A:** Of course it's so they can make it up to you the next time around, but it may also be a second chance to perfect their "special sauce".

**Q:** Why do we have very few African American leaders and why don't pastors play a leading role on the Affirmative Action proposal in the Nov 8th election? They influence us to go to church, but why do they seem to be nonexistent during election time? We are a community right? - Isaac L., Flint, MI

**A:** I have no idea why we have so few African American leaders. However, I do think the problem is that we spend too much time looking outside ourselves and our family for motivation and leadership, which I do understand because many of us have shitty families.

As far as pastors are concerned, unless you're filling up the collection plate they could care less about anything else. Just make sure you get your butt out there and vote. You don't need a pastor to tell you that!

**Q:** Can women have no strings attached sex or "booty calls" without getting caught up, as men do? -Wreal, Atlanta, Georgia

**A:** Yes, I don't have a problem with it at all!

**Q:** I love hip-hop just like the next hip-hop head, but what's up with all these rappers who buy gaudy ass jewelry, grillz, and 24" rims? Why can't rappers buy things such as land or real estate, something where the value will increase over time, not depreciate over time? - Lamont "Element" Wright, Esq., Flint, MI

**A:** I'm sure you've seen Crips on MTV, right? This show focuses on the real estate and cars that rappers purchase. The problem is that their purchases are always over the top. The real question should be - "Why can't rappers make sensible or simple purchases"? My answer is - You can take the brotha out of the hood, but you can't take the hood out of the brotha!

**Q:** Why do we as a collective hate the skin that we are in? Blacks want to be White, Whites want to be Black, people with straight hair want curly hair, blue eyed people want to have hazel eyes, etc. - Sensual Angel, Washington, DC

**A:** Yes, I agree that most of us are not happy with what God gave us, but let's be real, White people don't really want to be Black. White people enjoy mocking Black people and using a 'blackcent' like 'ol girl, Buck Wild, from the second season of Flavor of Love and Black people just want to be treated equally we don't really like the pasty look. And, anyone with blue eyes knows it's against the rules to trade them in for a second best pair of hazel eyes. Duh!

### **Homophobia**

Isaac's question touches on a subject that has been heavy on my mind lately. I believe that George W. Bush is the leader of the free world because he got to you judgmental types that view homosexuality as an issue. I especially believe this is how he got the Black vote because while many of you sit in church on your high horse you don't take stock of the fact that as Kanye said, "George Bush doesn't care about Black people", gay straight or otherwise. African Americans are dying from AIDS at an alarming rate. Is George W. gonna do something about that? Are you?



I keep hearing that George W. is a good Christian man. How so? What about George W. screams Christian? If you can name one thing about politics in general that screams Christianity, spirituality or love I'll give you a dollar.

Why do you care if homosexuals get married? Heterosexuals do it everyday and we suck at it. Are you afraid that homosexuals will do it better? Will your marriage be null and void if two men or two women exchange rings? I know you've heard this one, "If homosexuals are allowed to get married what's to stop people from marrying animals"? Do you really see animal and human marriages as something that we have to worry about or are you so damn ignorant that you would compare homosexuality to bestiality?

Let me make myself clear because I don't want to down religion. I am not against it, but too many religious people are arrogant and self righteous in their views and opinions. Some religious people use the Bible as a tool to hate and judge everyone who doesn't believe as they do. They say, "Homosexuality is a sin"! or "God man Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve"! Ahh, yes maybe so, but I also believe that God is love. God also forgives, and excuse me honey, you're not God and that thing you do at 12 am is also a sin. That drug you sniff, that life you took, that child you molest, that shit is most definitely a sin, so stop pointing the finger at people who love those that look just like them when naked, so that you can feel better about the sins you commit. Sin is sin, and we all do it. Yes, you too! Stop shaking your head and mind your own business.

The next time you make fun of Clay Aiken because you think he looks like K.D. Lang remember that his is probably bigger than yours. I'm talking about his bank account; your mind is so dirty.

Imagine  
by Misty O'Brien

Bitter      by Misty O'Brien

I'm not bitter. I'm not. I should have expected you to be like that.

Dreaming  
Of everything  
Hoping  
Of a brighter day  
Wishing  
Of a new way  
Seeing love  
Imagining  
Your sweet smile  
Understanding  
Unspoken words  
Knowing  
The promise of tomorrow  
Show me  
Feeling  
The softest touch  
Hearing  
The ideas you think  
Accepting  
An outstretched hand  
Please wait

Like what? Like that. All judgmental and self-righteous. You assume so much about what you know about my life. You mean about what you think you know about my life. You don't know one...thing. Nothing.

I had a dream-filled sleep last night. You don't know what those dreams are because you think you already know so much about me.

I answer the inevitable: who are you? What's your major? Where are you from? Really? I didn't think I had that much of an accent.

Days go by and you have a "pressing question." "I heard something..." That's what you meant. You listened to a rumor and now you only want me as your friend if it isn't true. What if it is?

But it's not matter to you. You heard more than I wanted to say. For that reason, I don't speak with you much anymore. I was mad, but I'm over it. I'm not bitter. Really, I'm not. I should have expected you to be like that.

**It says so in the Bible.** By Brianne Fidgety

I was still feeling pretty depressed last night. I cried a bunch. I thought about how much I hate my life. I wallowed in self-loathing. Then I did something I've never done before in such a situation -- I read the Good Book.

That's right. The Bible.

Believe it or not, I actually found myself admitting that my mood had improved significantly. Well, I suppose it was due less to any sort of spiritual awakening and more to the fact that I was laughing so hard. But whatever. We can let Pat Robertson have this one, can't we?

This grand adventure into Judeo-Christianity was prompted by an argument I had earlier in the day that got me thinking. I realized I'm pretty sick of hearing that the one definitive reason why homosexuality is wrong is because "the Bible says so". Ironically, most people who use that as a defense don't even know the one place where it's mentioned. But I do. It's in Leviticus<sup>1</sup>.

In fact, I know all about Leviticus. Well, now even moreso since I bothered to actually give it a glance-over. Man, it's a good thing I did! I've been *really* living in sin for far too long. I mean, I've been doing up and going crazy way more than I even thought possible. For instance, I was previously unaware that I have to be blessed by a priest seven days after the onset of my period; otherwise I'd be ritually unclean. And to think, all this time I've been living in the ignorant assumption that I was doing somewhat okay in the eyes of God since the only thing I really do when I'm done with bleeding monthly is to eat some red meat and be thankful that it's over. Also, I can't cut the hair around my temples. Those heathens at Master Cuts won't be getting *my* hard-earned money anymore, I can tell you that! In addition, I need to stop eating shellfish, ostrich, owls, and any insects that don't have wings and also hop. Of course, I'm going to have to go through my closet and get rid of everything that isn't 100% wool or linen. Apparently, poly-cotton blends are an abomination against the Lord!

Oh, and I can't forget those inspiring, though often rambling, passages on mildew! It turns out that all those moldy socks I've simply been throwing into the laundry should have instead gone to the priest for inspection and quarantine. Looks like I'll have to call Father Downs about those suspicious spots in the basement, too. Oh, and when I make my sacrifices of Saltines and unblemished, cloven animals that chew their cud, I'll have to make sure to do it at the proper time. God demonstrated his displeasure at two of Aaron's sons when they interrupted him from watching Plinko on the ever-popular game show *The Price is Right*<sup>2</sup> by incinerating them with fireballs. "I didn't ask for this *now*," God bellowed from his trailer.

I eventually found the part about homosexuality, and you know what it said? "No man should have sexual intercourse with another man; God hates that." That's a direct quote. I guess it goes without saying that the part about bodily fluids and the handling thereof was also a hoot. Plus, there was this ripping part towards the end where God totally went off about what He'd do if anybody deviated from living according to Leviticus. He'll punish you times and times and times seven until his wrath eventually gets up to like level fifty-six, or something. "And you'll run and run in fear as if somebody were chasing you, but there will not be anybody behind you. For I am the Lord your God." Way to prey on my crippling paranoia, God! You're awesome!

The point I'm trying to make<sup>3</sup> is the fact that you can't just pick and choose the crap you pull out of the Bible unless you're including all the crap around it. Taking things out of context is a pretty shitty thing to do. Unless you're doing it to be all cute and funny and trying to make a good Livejournal entry, or something -- then, in which case, it's fine. I think that's in Deuteronomy. Don't quote me on that, though. Unless you're actually living completely by these asinine rules, the feeble argument you're making is rendered moot by hypocrisy. And most people don't really live by Leviticus. Or ever have. *Ever!*

<sup>1</sup>People should learn that you shouldn't debate religion with an atheist. We just have nothing to lose, so it's kind of funny to us.

<sup>2</sup>I assume this for two reasons: *The Price is Right* has been on for that long, and I'd react violently, too, if somebody was dumb enough to step between me and Plinko.

<sup>3</sup>Maybe. Do I even have a point? Probably not.

**Agnostic** by Laura Cushing  
I never wanted to believe in God  
half as much as I wanted Him  
to believe in Me

Our Love's Domestic  
by Beth Langford

In the bedroom  
the flies meet their demise  
cradled in the lampshade.  
You and I,  
we live in comfort.

In the kitchen  
the cooks throw knives  
and catch them, laughing.  
You and I,  
we're all denouement.

On the front lawn  
the girls are learning to juggle fire  
to twirl it lightly around their bodies.  
You and I,  
we're soft.

I guess you're right. Our love's mundane  
like you suggested, our love's domestic.

Zero Absolute.  
by john o'brien

The boots lie to me as always  
and say the steps are tricky.

One two three  
four five  
and the door that didn't quite  
close in time  
is the last barrier.

The apartment hasn't changed  
a bit;  
ubiquitous white stinging  
eyes  
and freezer- burn smell carried  
on sullen dead air mist ...

There you are.

There you are  
my perfect dancer

ballerina caught in mid step  
crusted in locked vapor.

my gloved hand traces her again  
in vacuum gray.

marble eyes from a sculptor's womb  
sit atop aquiline nose  
and mouth that didn't quite  
close in

time

is the last barrier  
as the alerts shrill go off as my  
helmet's locks are undone

they grow quiet  
as my body protests with sleep.



Sunset by Misty O'Brien

note left on a pillow : february '84

golden ribbons of fate  
wrap my soul  
binding my consent  
surrendering myself  
my self

arms wrapped in chains  
i never thought i'd lock

till I met you

by Steve Green



Salt on the sidewalk by Misty O'Brien



Dancing by Laura Cushing

In winter, Wednesday is soup day at Java the Hut. There's a special soup of the week - which this particular week happened to be corn chowder. Snow was blowing past the windows of the coffee shop, and every time a customer came in, they brought with them a fresh gust of cold air. We were serving a lot of soup, things were busy. It wasn't until closing time that I noticed something wrong with Jenny - there hadn't been much time to think about it before then.

She was bent over the double sink in the back, scrubbing at the soup pot to get the last chowdery remains out of the bottom. She'd rolled up her sleeves to avoid getting her sweater dirty. Sallow in the dim light of the kitchen, her pale skin was marred with finger-wide bruises on each arm.

I set down the tray of cups I was carrying to the dishwasher and approached her cautiously.

"Hey..."

"Hey," she said, and didn't look up. She scrubbed the pot vigorously.

"Are you okay?" I asked.

"Mm-hm." She kept on scrubbing.

"Because, you know... your arms..."

"Don't you have work to do?" she snapped, turning on the spigot to flood the pot with hot water.

Steam rose, vaguely corn-scented.

"Yeah, I..."

"Then do it." She plunged her hands back into the pot.

I returned to the cups and dishwasher, carefully separating each along the rack so that they'd get clean all the way. I wiped down the counter, and started packing up the leftover muffins.

"You want some of these to take home?" I asked, instead of prying like I wanted to.

She looked up from drying the pot, smiled a bit sadly, shook her head no.

"I don't eat breakfast anymore."

"Okay," I said, and put them all together to take back with me. I'd distribute them at band practice tomorrow night- they'd still be fresh enough, and we weren't too picky.

Jenny was rolling her sleeves down, still not meeting my eyes. She sat down at the table by the door, lifted up her feet onto the chair next to her, sighed so sadly that it nearly broke my heart.

I came to sit at the table beside her. It took all of my restraint not to reach for her. I wanted to say something, anything, but no words would come. We watched the snow falling outside, the cars sloshing down the slushy streets, the people turning their collars upward and blowing on their hands as they moved past.

"He knows we went out," she said.

The flatness of her voice breaking the silence startled me momentarily. "How...?"

"I told him."

"Why?" I asked, wondering if I should feel guilty for taking her out. I couldn't... not even now. "It wasn't... it wasn't a date. Not really."

She didn't answer.

"Is it because we kissed?" I asked softly. This time, it had been me who kissed her, and not the other way around.

"No," she said, sighing and resting her head on her hands. "I didn't tell him about that."

"What then?"

"It's because we danced," she said, shaking her head.

I didn't understand why that should matter. We'd gone to a concert for a band we both liked, nothing more. And sure we danced, but everyone was dancing....

"It's because we continue to dance," she said, getting up from the table to gather her things.

Headlights shone in the storefront window, blinding my sight of her. Her boyfriend beeped three times in rapid succession, his usual signal.

Before I could ask her not to leave, she was gone. A bit of snow swirled in through the door as it closed.

**Reckless** by Trina Shealy Orton

"I want you," she said, plopping into the over-stuffed chair. It was hot in the apartment, and the bottle of beer she held in her hand trailed its own wet beads down her skin to mingle with sweat. Absentmindedly she licked the moisture away.

"No, Maia." Janet shook her dark head, short hair sticking to her forehead. When Maia stuck out her lower lip, Janet sighed in exasperation. "It's... No." Silence. She fanned herself uselessly with her hand.

Arch

By Rick Silva

Footfall echoes rumble in the linear expanse of cloistered corridors, stone-skipping against thunder's muted baritone that resonates through the granite-marble foundations, turning corners at apexes of the gothic arches.

Lightning strobes from latticed windowpanes, splashing shattered patterns, fractured geometry in floortile patches stationed at luminated intervals, encoding nature's inscrutable binary, a shifting cipher of on, off, light, dark, storm, calm.

The rain waits, hanging above as the headman's axe pauses, searching out the hushed tone of attention from the audience, and beneath the garden archway youth pretends to courage and comfort, the pair together, their lips seal the keystone, strong, better to resist what falls.

Remembering her own beer, she tipped it up to her lips, sweeping the hair away from her eyes with her other hand. As she swallowed the cold brew, Maia watched the line of Janet's neck and noticed the way the sweat made her tank-top stick to her breasts.

"I don't care." Maia leaned forward, caressing her cheek with her beer, and stared at Janet with smoky eyes. "I want to taste you, and I'll die if I don't."

Janet rolled her eyes and laughed. "Do you realize how dumb that sounds?"

Maia scowled as Janet kept giggling. "Fuck you, too, huh?"

Janet walked over to one of the fans set up in the tiny room and faced it. "Oh, I know! It's just so silly." She lifted her shirt to let the air underneath. Maia strained for a peek of flesh. "I don't even want to think about how many times we've gone over this." Janet turned around, lifting the back of her shirt.

Maia muttered under her breath.

"What?"

Maia growled, "We've done it. Remember? You let me taste you, and... it was good." Maia emptied her bottle. Placing it on the coffee table, she sighed. "So tell me, why do I keep coming around?"

Janet lifted an eyebrow and let her shirt drop. Walking over to the kitchen and grabbing two fresh bottles, she uncapped them and handed one to Maia.

"Well, that's a shitty thing to say. And knowing how I feel, I don't know why the fuck you keep pushing." More beer was consumed. "Yeah, it was good. Then. But, I just... don't know." Maia snorted, drank. "Dammit Maia, if you can say cheesy shit about 'dying without your taste', then I can fucking tell you that I just don't fucking know. You're a great friend. I'd be lost if you weren't around. But I can't handle something like that." Janet shrugged. "Not now, anyway. Maybe not ever. So please, don't force the issue, okay?"

"All right, all right."

"Anyway, it's too damn hot to think about."

Maia sat back and threw one leg over the chair's plush arm. She pressed her beer between her breasts. Tipping her head back, she said, "I know I'm being unfair, and I know you're unsure, but it's hard for me, too. I want you Janet." Pause. "I want you so badly."

"You have me now!"

"Not like that."

"But 'that' was only once!"

"So? You're fucking sexy, and you feel familiar under my hands..." Maia stood up, downed the beer and marched into the kitchen. "Oh fuck it Janet. I guess I don't know either. Maybe now it's because I can't have you, and if I have you again, it'll be disappointing." She shrugged. "But maybe it'll be better."

Turning away, she opened the freezer and poked her head in, lifting her honeyed ponytail.

"Maia, I'm sorry."

"I know." She closed the freezer and turned to find Janet behind her.

"If I could help you, I would. I... just... Yeah, you're right. Fuck it. I don't know what I need, should, or want to say."

"Janet..." Maia began to reach out her hand.

"Maia?" The hand stopped, shaking. Janet sighed. "I need to go to bed. Work in the morning, you know."

"Oh. Yeah. Right." Tucking her hands under her arms, Maia sidled away. She was nearly in tears, and this was stupid. Except she was in love with Janet, had been since before they'd even slept together. She didn't know why she stuck around, keeping up the "just friends" bit; watching her date men (men!) was malevolent torture. She didn't know why she kept after Janet, either. Reckless fantasy? Futile hope? Sublime torture?

It didn't mean as much to Janet. It had been an experiment. There was no way she could possibly know that Maia was in love with her. So Maia hung around, too scared to tell Janet the truth and taking confidences that cracked her heart, feeling her soul being ripped away bits at a time.

"Mind if I crash on the couch?"

"Isn't that what you usually do? Oh, and be sure to grab a fan." Janet had a glass of water, and

Sticky

By Rick Silva

"We don't have humidity like this."

So said the woman from New Mexico as I helped her haul her luggage up to the stairs of her weeklong quarters in the old New England boarding school dorm.

At the reception water droplets beaded up on coke cans and beer bottles while people chatted about the weather squinting at name tags, asking hometowns.

Each dorm room had a fan although during the Q&A one man noted that the power cord for his had been cut, no doubt the work of the same teenagers responsible for the lack of screens on the windows.

Teenagers and window screens apparently are incompatible.

Walking into town I sweated in the windless night, passing skateboarders and closed up shops.

The wrapper from the honeybun I bought spread its stickiness across my hand as I searched all of Main Street in vain for a trash receptacle.

I was back in school before I found one.

the ice floating inside tinkled. Maia wished the cubes would melt soon.

Janet turned off all but the one lamp by the couch, and then stood over Maia.

"Goodnight." Pause. "I'm sorry."

Maia lifted her eyes from tanned, firm stomach. "I know."

Moving away, Janet stopped and looked back before going the bedroom door. "Sleep... well, as best you can in this heat."

Maia nodded in the near dark and curled onto the couch, strangely cold despite the sweat still covering her body. "Goodnight."

She waited for the sounds of Janet settling into bed before she reached over and turned off the lamp. In the dark, she whimpered softly before burying her face in the cushions. She told herself she wouldn't do this again. She couldn't. No more. It hurt too fucking much.

Still, as the silence deepened (except for the whirring of fans) and the apartment settled into restless sleep and moonless night, Maia flipped onto her back. One hand twisted in her hair. The other hand started a slow decent from her neck, gliding over her breasts and stomach, and finally slipped into the waistband of her shorts.

In her fantasies, Janet was hers, a lustfully fierce she-god. Maia resigned herself that this was just another night in an endless loop, and she would willingly live it over again. She writhed with primitive wanting.

## **The Salad Bar**

by Brett Yates

Although he was the principal of East Branchville High School, Tom Patterson still had to pay for lunch in the cafeteria. This seemed absurd to him. He remembered his first day on the job: It had been a couple minutes after noon, and he'd had his food on his tray. He walked by the cashier, assuming that he, unlike the students, would get his lunch for free. The cashier immediately called him back to request payment. At the time, he didn't mind handing over a few dollars a day, so he didn't argue.

Generally, people thought of Tom as a nice guy, and he understood how they had stumbled upon this misapprehension: He behaved like a nice guy. He had, in fact, been a nice guy in the past, and it was still the only way he knew how to act. He smiled, had a warm sense of humor, and never shouted. In his days as a genuine nice guy, he had actually wanted to carry himself this way, and his kind words had been sincere. Now, he hated every pleasantry, every congenial jest, and every comment about the agreeable weather, yet they still came out of his mouth. He no longer had any kindness inside him, but he was stuck in the role of the kind man. It was a performance, and he couldn't stop performing.

For this reason, he now could not bring himself to fight the cafeteria staff. He deserved a free lunch for all the time he had spent dealing with anarchistic students, unmotivated teachers, and dissatisfied parents, but it wasn't in character for him to complain about a couple dollars. Of course, the character he played did not at all represent his real self, but he found himself incapable of showing that to anyone. He didn't know how to argue or express anger; in his younger years, he had never needed to, and now, in his slightly older years, it was too late to learn. Consequently, he continued to pay for his lunch.

The beauty of the cashier, Rita, who was far too pretty to work in a school cafeteria, made the process additionally maddening. He had grown to dislike attractive women. Each one he considered a painfully jarring break in the continuity of existence's misery and ugliness, where, without them, he perhaps could at least find a steady home in the cheerless stream. He felt it almost fortunate that his wife had become so ugly over the years. And this made him wonder if there remained anything in him that life had not twisted around to the opposite of its original direction.

Tom considered avoiding the situation at the cafeteria by going out for lunch, but he rarely had time: He had too much work to do to spend more than a couple minutes eating. Besides, he knew at the cafeteria which foods to avoid, such anything with the low-grade meat in it, and what was OK, like the salad. With his penchant to avoid exercise, he couldn't go to a fast food joint and eat burgers, so the salad seemed like the best option, even though he had to stifle a scream of anger every time he purchased one.

Then a brilliant plan struck him like lightning -- a plan that, if successful, would rid him of that internal scream. He had found a loophole in the cafeteria staff's system.

The seeds of the plan had been planted one day when he happened to choose to eat in the faculty lounge. This wasn't his usual routine: The faculty lounge was a considerable distance away and took several minutes to walk to, so to save time, he typically ate where he bought the food -- in the cafeteria, from which he could then go straight to his office, which was in close proximity, to work. But on that fateful day, three factors had altered his routine and would ultimately, he hoped, alter his entire life, too: First, the cafeteria was noisier than usual from the excitement due to it being a Friday before a three-day weekend, and Tom felt he could not stand it; second, two students who had been in a quarrel with the other members of their table had adopted the principal's as their own to distance themselves from their temporary enemies, leaving Tom, who found sitting with students awkward, no place to eat alone; and third, he had less work than average to do and thus had little need to conserve time, and he knew that it would be no problem to take a few minutes to walk to the teacher's lounge. In a roundabout way, this opened his eyes to the cafeteria's weak spot.

Salads were assembled by the customer at a salad bar. They were then weighed on a small scale

next to the cash register, and the more the salad weighed, the more it cost. The salad bar was used almost exclusively by faculty, as most of the teachers were overweight and couldn't eat the fatty foods that the students generally selected. Many of the teachers desired to eat outside or in the lounge, but they complained about returning the plates, which needed to be washed, as they were porcelain because environmentally conscious students had protested against the wasteful Styrofoam ones. Teachers didn't like to walk all the way back to the cafeteria, although, Tom thought, it would be good for those who were eating the salad to lose weight. Consequently, an alternative to the plate was offered: a recyclable plastic container for "takeout" salads. Now, teachers could travel as far as they wanted to eat and didn't have to worry about bringing back the plate. Now they could drive to the park to eat if they had time. All was well for a while; then, another complaint appeared. It seemed that, by the time these teachers got to the park and settled, their salad, which had been dressed from a bottle at the school, had become soggy. After much deliberation, someone came up with a solution: The cafeteria could offer small, lidded plastic cups into which the teachers could put their dressing. They could then take a cup or two with them to the park and dress the salad there, immediately before eating it, thus avoiding sogginess. In private, Tom rolled his eyes at his employees' incessant whining. But, as it turned out, this whining would save him money every day and give him the opportunity to silently spite the staff that thought he was such a nice guy.

On the day of the unbearable noise in the cafeteria, Tom, because he was taking his salad out of the cafeteria, opted for the plastic container instead of the plate and, instead of pouring the dressing straight onto the salad, he took one of the tiny plastic cups, poured dressing into it, and covered it with its lid. Then, when he took his salad to Rita to be weighed, he noticed something: He hadn't put the cup of dressing onto the scale. Rita didn't comment upon this. In Tom's standard approach, the oil and vinegar added extra weight to the salad and, as a result, added perhaps an extra cent to the price. In the cup and off the scale, the dressing was free -- whereas, on the salad and on the scale, it was not. He smiled when he realized this, but he thought little of it. After all, what could an extra cent do for him?

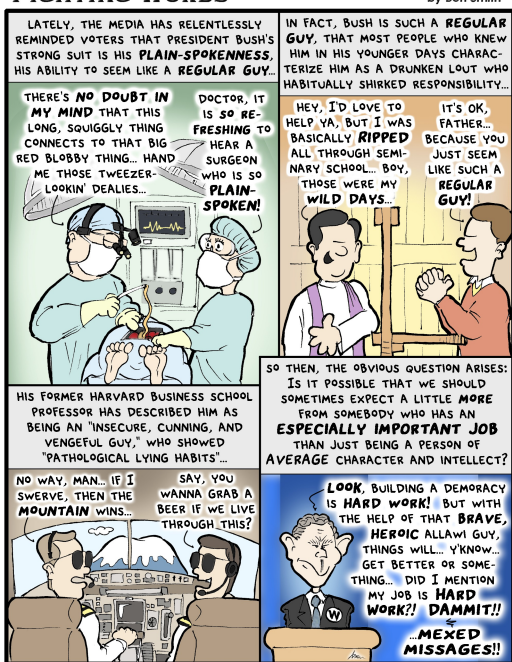
And then, two days later, the plan occurred to him. The cup wasn't being weighed. The contents of the cup were free. Customers were allowed to take as many cups as they wanted. Therefore, the contents of several cups would be free. With enough cups, he could make a pretty serious haul. Moreover, nowhere was there a sign stating that one could only fill the cups with dressing; that was the idea, but there was no rule.

Now Tom knew he could make as large a salad as he wanted and wouldn't have to pay. All he had to do was cram the ingredients into the plastic cups. Of course, a large salad would require a lot of cups and a lot of time spent stuffing cups with lettuce and tomato, but Tom was willing to do it, even if it would take up time that he could use for working. It seemed too sweet to pass up. He would also take with him a ceramic plate onto which to empty the contents of his cups, but as the plate would be empty, it would be free: Rita, when calculating the salad's price, always subtracted the weight of the plate or container so as not to give those who favored the former a disadvantage because the ceramic weighed more than the plastic.

When the time finally came to try this technique, Tom could barely contain his excitement. The clock read noon, and he had to stop himself from jumping up and down in line for the salad bar. When the teacher in front of him finished and moved out of the way, Tom jumped to the right side of the bar and grabbed twenty plastic cups from the bin. He spread them across the bar, removed their lids, and frantically began to load them with lettuce, onion, tomato, cucumber, carrot, celery, and dressing. He put the lids back on. Then he placed the cups on the left side of his tray in four stacks of five each. Beside them, he put a clean ceramic plate and a fork. Parading slowly past the cashier, he wanted to make sure she knew what he was doing. When lovely Rita spotted him, her face contorted in shock and disbelief. He felt as if he were wielding not a tray but a deadly weapon. He grinned maniacally in victory. Tom strutted to his seat. One by one, he opened the plastic cups. He emptied the contents of each onto his plate and then stirred the salad around with his fork. He took a bite. It tasted the same as it had the previous day. It wasn't any worse, but it wasn't any better, either. He continued to eat, and the thrill of his escapade began to

## FIGHTING WORDS

by Ben Smith





subside. Rita had moved on to other customers and looked pretty again. And, apparently, no one else had noticed his triumph. The students paid him no particular attention. He wondered if the rest of the day would be any different in the wake of his achievement, but he couldn't see how it would be. It would be the same work; he would just have a little less time to do it in because his caper had taken up an extra minute or two of his day. He had a few extra dollars in his wallet, but he couldn't think of anything very exciting to do with them. He finished eating.

8:12:80

by Steve Green

He knew that life was good and war was hell  
No need for politics on his lapel  
All those who heard his songs alone could tell  
All he was saying  
Was give peace a chance

He sang of love and all that love entails  
But all they talk of now is record sales  
To businessmen so blind the message fails  
All he was saying  
Was give peace a chance

But perhaps in death there is not yet defeat  
If at some time in some dark distant street  
A stranger hears the wisdom not the beat  
And sees that  
All he was saying  
Was give peace a chance

for John

**Marcia** by Erin Britton

Years back, before mum got into self-medication and dad got into his secretary, we were actually a pretty stable, sociable family.

Or so James tells me anyway.

Apparently, near on every weekend the whole troupe of us would be loaded into the back of the car, Tim in his special seat while the rest of us kids battled it out for the remaining space, and then we'd motor off to a shindig at the home of some friend or other of my parents. The idea of us as a partying family is pretty much beyond the scope of my imagination at this point but James is five years older than me and, since he was the only one I know who can be relied upon to explain the Off Side Rule, I guess his memory can be trusted.

My own memories can only be trusted from a time after the invitations stopped coming. James thinks that the people we knew back then had always seemed a little uncomfortable around Tim and that the older and bigger he got, the more uncomfortable they became. James says it was easier for people to cut off the whole family, even those of us that they kind of liked, than for them to learn how to relate to Tim like we did.

In fairness, we weren't dumped by everyone;

some people didn't have any better options than my family available to them.

The one person who stands out in my mind from those days is Marcia, my mum's best friend/nemesis since school. No one, not even mum, made any attempt to pretend that visiting Marcia was fun. During most of our visits, dad used to stay in the car while mum and us kids were subjected to tea and cakes and poisonous chitchat. It seemed that Marcia didn't actually like any other living person and felt no compulsion to pretend otherwise. To this day, I have no idea what mum got out of that particular friendship except perhaps that when a person gets to a certain age, they desperately need to have someone around who knew them when they were young.

One day, the third worst day of my life in fact, everyone, save for me and mum, were busy and so only the two of us went to visit Marcia. She was sitting in the kitchen waiting for us as usual but she seemed paler than usual, paler and more venomous.

I guess she hadn't had the opportunity to exercise her wit on many people lately because she started straight in on my mum, digging away at every little thing trying to get a rise. Marcia had grown up in the time before chat shows, the time when people thought that making fun of someone would help them to lose weight, and so it's even possible that she believed she was helping mum. Possible but unlikely. My mum was maybe ten pounds overweight but she was pretty sensitive about it and Marcia knew just how much it bothered her.

I wasn't exactly a perfect physical specimen myself and was just at the age where I realized that fact. I guess I was pretty scared that Marcia might finish with mum and start on me and so I joined in with her teasing.

The most vivid memory from my childhood is of standing outside the bathroom door in Marcia's house, crying for my mum, as mum stood behind the locked door sobbing loudly in front of the mirror. As I stood there, I cursed Marcia and wished on her all the many misfortunes that my childish mind could think up. I don't think I've ever concentrated harder on anything in my life.

We didn't visit Marcia for a couple of weeks after that day but eventually and with no particular explanation, mum started to go back, week on week, as if nothing had happened. She might have decided to forgive and forget but I hadn't, every night before bed I used to reaffirm my curse and my hope that Marcia would eventually poison herself from the inside out.

\*\*\*\*\*

For my eleventh birthday I got a CD by some group that seemed like the most important band in the world at the time that I used to listen to every opportunity I got. I was so busy singing along to it as my dad drove that I didn't even realize we were heading to Marcia's house until the car stopped and he told me to go inside and get my mother.

I didn't want to admit, not even to myself, that I was still scared of her and so I ran straight up to

the back door and let myself into the kitchen, expecting to find Marcia and my mum drinking their regulation cup of tea.

They weren't in the kitchen and so I moved further into the house to find them. I heard my mum's voice coming from the living room, a room I was surprised to realize I'd never been in before, and so I opened the door slightly and looked inside. It was an unexpectedly grim room for Marcia's otherwise neat and orderly house, the curtains were closed and there was an oppressive smell of stale air. Instead of a sofa, there was a bed in the middle of the room which Marcia lay on, propped up by a stack of pillows. My mum was sitting on a chair next to the bed, reading aloud from a newspaper.

Marcia had never been a picture of health but she seemed to have positively decayed since I last saw her. Her skin was now a shiny grey and seemed to be sagging away from her face, the lines puckering away from her mouth now reaching nearly to her eyes. Marcia had always been quite particular about her appearance but even from across the room I could see that she was wearing stained pajamas and that her hair was badly in need of cutting. When my mum called out a greeting to me, Marcia could barely turn her head in my direction. It seemed like her body had totally given up on her.

My heart was beating so fast as I walked over to my mum – my curse had worked! I had revenge, I had power, I could do anything.

My mum told me to sit down on the edge of the bed while she finished reading the last of the paper. I was so proud of myself and what I'd done to Marcia that I think I sat there grinning the whole time my mum was reading. I wasn't paying any attention to the two of them, I just stared at the pages of the newspaper and thought about what I would use my power for next.

After perhaps ten or fifteen minutes, mum stopped reading and started saying goodbye to Marcia, saying that she'd be back the same time next week to see her. I looked up at her at this point and was surprised to see tears in her eyes, she was pretty near on crying as she said goodbye. I looked at Marcia's face properly for the first time since I'd arrived, expecting her to start mocking my mum and her weakness, but all I saw was Marcia trying to smile, only half of her face wouldn't cooperate so it ended up looking pretty damn weird. She was crying too, the first time I'd ever seen Marcia cry, but her eyes seemed to be glittering slightly.

As I was getting up to leave, I felt her give my hand a weak squeeze.

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On the drive home, I vowed that from now on, I would only ever use my power for good.

## C o n t r i b u t o r s

**Beth Langford** is a zoology student who recently spent a summer in the Yukon, working as a plant ecology research assistant.

**Eric Blair** was born in the fall of 1982, though no one is entirely sure why. In a futile attempt to give his life meaning he co-created the Salt Lake City publication Chiaroscuro. He is also a member of the experimental music trio The Samuel Powers Rhythm 3. He is expected to die of liver failure. If you have nothing better to do you can contact him via e-mail - [EricBlair23@gmail.com](mailto:EricBlair23@gmail.com).

**Erin Britton** lives in London where she intends to keep studying law until she hits upon a more useful way to spend her time. Erin has recently joined the technical age and anyone who would like to is welcome to stop by her myspace page: [www.myspace.com/doingiterinstyle](http://www.myspace.com/doingiterinstyle)

**Brett Yates** lives in NJ, where he spends his time reading, writing, and watching movies. He can be reached at [brettayates@gmail.com](mailto:brettayates@gmail.com) or, often, at the Spotswood Diner.

**Laura Cushing** yet lives. Find her at [www.labarc.com](http://www.labarc.com).

**Rick Silva** grew up in Boston, MA, attended Cornell University, and teaches high school chemistry on Cape Cod, where he lives with his wife & two cats. He co-writes the comic *Zephyr & Reginald: Minions*

DON'T BY MISTY O'BRIEN

DON'T

DON'T TOUCH ME

DON'T LOVE ME

DON'T TELL ME WHAT TO FEEL

DON'T

DON'T KISS ME

DON'T TAKE ME

DON'T DRIVE ME ANYWHERE

DON'T

YOU DON'T KNOW HOW I AM

YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT I'LL SAY

YOU DON'T KNOW HOW I'LL REACT

DON'T

DON'T HOLD MY HAND

DON'T WIPE MY TEARS

DON'T EXPECT AN ANSWER FROM ME

DON'T

DON'T STIFLE MY DREAM

DON'T STOMP ON MY SPIRIT

DON'T DEMAND MY ETERNAL DEVOTION

DON'T

I DON'T KNOW WHY I TRUSTED YOU

I DON'T KNOW WHO YOU ARE

I DON'T KNOW WHY YOU'RE HERE

DON'T

DON'T TOUSLE MY HAIR

DON'T EAT MY FOOD

DON'T SING MY SONGS

DON'T

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